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Chairman: Mr. Al Bayati ..... (Iraq)

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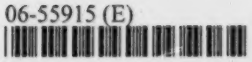

The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Agenda item 61: Advancement of women (*continued*) (A/61/283, A/61/303)

(a) Advancement of women (*continued*) (A/61/381, A/61/122 and Add.1, A/61/318 and A/61/292)

(b) Implementation of the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women and of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly (*continued*) (A/61/174)

1. **Mr. Amil** (Pakistan), commending the relevant reports of the Secretary-General, particularly the long awaited in-depth study on all forms of violence against women (A/61/122 and Add.1), said that as long as violence against women continued, there could be no real progress towards equality, development and peace. Pursuant to the Beijing Platform for Action, Pakistan had launched a national plan of action, which included judicial and police reforms and promoted effected partnership with civil society to help raise awareness of gender issues. Women currently had increased opportunities for legal redress when they felt that their rights were violated. In view of cultural and traditional sensitivities, separate women police stations as well as separate complaint cells had been established to provide safe and confidential investigative services to women. Rehabilitation and crisis centres had been opened in various cities to provide round-the-clock medical and legal aid to women and shelter.

2. His Government had banned the un-Islamic and harmful traditional practice of exchange marriages and early marriages in Pakistan. In a landmark decision, the Supreme Court of Pakistan had banned traditions like vani, by which blood feuds were settled with forced marriages. To eliminate the culture of impunity and bring domestic laws into compliance with international commitments, various legislative amendments had also been introduced, making the culturally entrenched practice of honour killing, for example, punishable by death. Legislation had also been enacted to make all offences except murder or terrorism bailable, which had enabled 1,300 women prisoners who had been languishing in jails for various minor crimes to be released quickly.

3. With respect to political reforms, women's political representation in the Senate, National Assembly and Provincial Assemblies as well as in the local government had been enhanced to an unprecedented level. Women in Pakistan currently enjoyed 33 per cent representation in the local government and 20 per cent in the National Assembly and Senate. Three Federal Ministers, five Ministers of State and several parliamentary secretaries in the National Parliament were women. His Government had also established a 10 per cent quota for women in government jobs. Women were being encouraged to enter areas of activity traditionally dominated by men, such as the Air Force. On the economic front, various microcredit programmes had been launched to fund women's income-generating projects. While much remained to be done, his Government was strongly committed to achieving gender equality and the true empowerment of women in Pakistan.

4. **Ms. Critchlow** (Guyana), speaking on behalf of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), said that CARICOM States attached high priority to issues concerning women, which was shown by the equal rights accorded to women and men through their constitutions and the increased sensitivity to gender in their national development strategies. Many challenges remained, however. The report of the Secretary-General on the work of the Organization (A/61/1) had noted, for instance, the higher than average death rate during pregnancy and childbirth among women in developing countries, the missed goal of gender parity in education by 2005 in keeping with the Millennium Development Goals and the epidemic of violence against women. In the interest of the long-term goal of gender equality and the empowerment of women, such shortcomings must be addressed with urgency.

5. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women was a vital instrument for promoting gender equality. Every State of the CARICOM region was a party to the Convention and had presented, at least, its initial report to the Committee. Her delegation welcomed the extension of the annual meeting time of the Committee, which had allowed it to consider an increased number of country reports in its attempt to eliminate the substantial backlog.

6. Guided by the Beijing Platform for Action and other internationally agreed development frameworks, including the Goals, CARICOM States had been making incremental progress in enhancing the status of women. Women of the region were benefiting from

increased access to education and participated more actively in politics and decision-making, though such participation was not uniform throughout the region. Those achievements notwithstanding, gender-based violence, the disproportionately higher levels of HIV/AIDS and poverty among women were but a few of the challenges which required increased attention.

7. In recognition of the linkages between poverty and violence against women, Ministers of the region had agreed to make gender mainstreaming a key priority for policy and programming activities and to enhance efforts to address the feminization of poverty and female unemployment. As the prevalence of poverty and its impact on the status of women were factors in the international economic environment, her delegation emphasized the need for an increased flow of resources, improved terms of trade and debt relief as a means of assisting developing countries and called for the early resumption of negotiations on the Doha Development Round.

8. The Pan-Caribbean Partnership against HIV/AIDS was the principal mechanism for coordinating regional action to halt and reverse the spread of the epidemic, and national programmes were generally focused on increased public awareness, de-stigmatization of the epidemic and enhanced access to treatment, care and support, including access to reproductive health services and antiretroviral drugs. Several of the national HIV/AIDS programmes had reported reductions in the incidence of mother to child transmission of the disease.

9. The Regional Commission on Gender-Based Violence had been established to address the causes of violence against women. Attention was also being given to the problem of human trafficking. CARICOM therefore welcomed the Secretary-General's timely in-depth study on all forms of violence against women. The success of anti-trafficking efforts much depended on greater awareness of that issue, increased economic opportunities for women and strengthened legislation and enforcement. In conclusion, her delegation stressed the continued importance of concerted action by the international community in support of the advancement of women and the realization of the goal of gender equality.

10. **Mr. Saeed** (Sudan) said that violence against women was rejected by all religions and all legislations. His delegation welcomed the publication of the study of that subject prepared by the Secretary-General and was examining it carefully in order to be able to participate with other Member States in whatever steps might be taken in that regard. The Sudan continued to be a pioneer with respect to women's enjoyment of all their civil and political rights and the promotion of their participation in policymaking. The gains in that area had been achieved as early as the 1960s, and the presence of Sudanese women continued to be outstanding in all fields. The first woman had entered the Sudanese Parliament in 1965 and the number of women Parliamentarians had grown significantly since that time.

11. Women occupied leadership positions in both the judicial and executive branches at the federal, state and municipal levels, serving as presidential advisers, ministers, governors, judges and ambassadors. Legislation had been passed to strengthen those gains in areas such as non-discrimination in employment, equal pay, protection against hazards and violence, training opportunities, vacations and maternity leave and the right to participate in unions. At all levels of education, female enrolment had made significant gains over the preceding decade, thanks to Government efforts and policies, actually surpassing male enrolment in higher education. Other important governmental strategies relating to women pertained to safe maternity and health for all.

12. Sudanese women had played a role in peacemaking, taking part in the consultative delegations to the Naivasha and Abuja negotiations. They played an effective role in peacebuilding and reconstruction projects through the Women's Centre for Peace and Development, in partnership with the United Nations and its organizations and agencies active in the area of women's issues. They also participated through a programme for the qualification of female cadres in fields such as negotiation; strengthening of social dialogue; training of women in the field of early warning for dispute settlement; the propagation of a culture of peace and the rejection of violence; and programmes for the social reintegration of women returnees from refugee camps. Also significant was the pioneering presence of Sudanese women in foreign programmes, meetings and conferences and their outstanding contributions in the areas of strengthening bonds among peoples and exchanging experience and expertise in the various fields of women's activities.

13. Palestinian women were the victims of murders and expulsions under Israeli occupation. The United Nations must take immediate action to end that suffering and ensure the rights of Palestinian women to a life of freedom and dignity in an independent homeland that enjoyed the same rights as the other nations of the world.

14. **Ms. Blum** (Colombia) said that her Government was committed to the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. Women were placed at the centre of Colombia's peace and development policies, which included increasing employment and educational opportunities and political participation and addressing violence against women. In Colombia, men and women enjoyed equal access to education at all levels. Colombia's measures to promote economic growth had increased productive employment for men and women alike. It was carrying out microcredit and business training programmes for female-headed households and promoted specialized fairs for businesses run by women to help to ensure more stable and equitable income. Women's participation in decision-making positions at all levels of government was high. Such participation had been given added impetus in 2005 when the 16 most influential political parties and movements of Colombia had endorsed a pact for the effective inclusion of women in politics.

15. With respect to violence against women, her Government's security policy had led to the reduction of all crime indicators in the country and generated a greater atmosphere of tranquillity and coexistence for all men and women in Colombia. Legislative efforts were also being made to protect the rights of women in violent family situations, after the break-up of a marital union and at the workplace. In addition, a strategy had been developed to combat trafficking in persons, including prevention, training of government officials, legal prosecution, international cooperation, victim and witness protection and information systems. Furthermore, Colombia had signed an agreement with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees aimed at incorporating a gender focus in its prevention and protection policies for displaced persons.

16. Her Government had also established a monitoring mechanism on gender issues in January 2006 to develop a system of indicators and follow-up on official plans and policies. It had also distributed a manual to train public officials to incorporate gender perspectives into public policies. Lastly, her delegation noted with interest the report of the Secretary-General on the in-depth study on all forms of violence against women and on measures taken and progress achieved in follow-up to the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly (A/61/174).

17. **Ms. Sanders-Ten Holte** (Netherlands) said that political and economic power went hand in hand. Discrimination against women would continue and the Millennium Development Goals remain elusive until women were fully included in the decision-making process at all levels. In order to achieve a deeper, more inclusive, value-driven democracy, men and women must work side by side for equality. More than 70 per cent of the people living on less than a dollar a day were women. Globalization had led to increased employment opportunities for women, but gender inequalities with respect to the quality of work, pay and working conditions had intensified. The contribution of women to development was still highly underestimated. Rural women produced, for example, 60 per cent to 80 per cent of food in developing countries, but many faced restrictions on the right to own, use and inherit land.

18. Women were underrepresented at all levels of decision-making: globally the proportion of women in parliaments had increased from 11 per cent in 1995 to 16 per cent in 2006, but only 14 per cent of countries had achieved the target of 30 per cent representation of women in their national parliaments set by the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action. Only 11 States had a female head of government. In the developed North, fewer than 20 per cent of political and corporate leaders are women. In the Netherlands, the percentage of women corporate leaders was only 3 per cent.

19. Women's movements tended to invest most of their energy in strategies aimed at halting the exploitation, discrimination, sexual violence and limitations that women faced in their daily lives. Learning to be assertive and mainstreaming strategies were not enough, however. Women should be decision-makers and economic leaders in their own right. There was a need to focus on new ways of making connections between men and women and to seek ways of linking the women's movement to other social movements and campaigns. For gender equality to be attained, women needed more knowledge, income, respect and self-esteem. Such changes could only be

sustained if men had a positive attitude towards that strategy.

20. The strategy would include an alliance between men and women to enhance the participation of women in decision-making; serious investments in education to fight poverty and promote cultural change; political training at all levels and education in good governance; firm support for women's organizations and women entrepreneurs in recognition that women are agents for development; and enhanced access in the area of information and communication technology to create business and employment opportunities and facilitate networking.

21. The minimum target for the share of women's participation in leadership positions should be one-third — in politics and government as well as economic institutions and boardrooms. Setting targets along the lines of Norway's new rules for equal representation on company boards, which included sanctions, could truly make a difference. Lastly, the United Nations should be leading the way towards gender equality, including through the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

22. **Mr. Hatem** (Iraq) said that Iraq had been a pioneer in the field of women's rights since the earliest times. Indeed, King Hammurabi had established one of the most ancient sets of laws known to history for the purpose of providing justice for all human beings, including women. Though a party to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, Iraq had not achieved tangible results in recent decades owing to successive conflicts. After a long period of dictatorship and repression, Iraq was now striving to lay the foundations of democracy and human rights and was observing a broadening of women's participation in the political sphere and civil society. Active women's organizations were being formed amid the emergence of new concepts such as civil society, non-governmental organizations, democracy and transfer of authority. After suffering decades of hardship and non-participation in political life, women had demonstrated their worth and their ability to meet challenges and assume responsibility.

23. Women in Iraq had defied all manner of terrorism and taken part in the 2005 elections, which had resulted in their occupying 31 per cent of the seats in the Transitional National Assembly, one of whose most important tasks had been to draft a Constitution. In 2006, Iraqi women had obtained four Cabinet posts, one of which was that of Minister of Women's Affairs, established in 2004. Moreover, the role of the High-level National Committee for the Advancement of Iraqi Women had been strengthened by the establishment of a mechanism to follow up the related strategy in accordance with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and women now held 25 per cent of the seats in Parliament under Iraq's permanent Constitution.

24. The Constitution contained articles to promote gender equality with respect to political rights, including the right to vote and the right to stand for public office; equality before the law without discrimination; and equality for women in areas such as social and health security, an adequate income and proper housing. It also provided that at least one quarter of the Members of Parliament should be women. Civil society organizations had played an important role in the advancement of women through the development of gender analysis skills, gender mainstreaming and the empowerment of national women's institutions. The Iraqi people were currently in need of assistance from States and all international and regional organizations in achieving stability, security and advancement, special attention being devoted to Iraqi women to help them meet the challenges of establishing a society based on true democracy and respect for human rights.

25. **Mr. Ritter** (Liechtenstein) said that the growing international attention paid to violence against women had its origin in the relentless efforts and grassroots work of women's organizations and movements around the world. He welcomed the broad involvement of the different stakeholders involved in the report of the Secretary-General providing the in-depth study on all forms of violence against women (A/61/122 and Add.1), noting that the report addressed issues that were often perceived, not least by victims of violence, as taboos or non-issues, such as the impact of culture and its politicization on the phenomenon of violence against women. Liechtenstein supported the emphasis in the study on the need to take effective counter-measures at all levels, including the local and community levels.

26. The study provided all the elements for a comprehensive text on violence against women to be adopted by the General Assembly. In that context, he welcomed specific discussion on such violence in other

intergovernmental bodies such as the Security Council, the Commission on the Status of Women, the Peacebuilding Commission and the Human Rights Council, with the latter playing the leading role in that process. Liechtenstein also welcomed the study's emphasis on the pressing need for ending impunity for acts of violence against women, which should be a top priority of national judicial systems. The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC) treated violence against women in the context of crimes against humanity and war crimes. He hoped that the Court would soon be able to send a clear signal on impunity. In that regard, the Court and its Trust Fund for Victims were a promising example which needed to be followed and consolidated to enable States and the international community to meet the challenge of eliminating violence against women.

27. **Ms. Vikor** (Norway) said that the United Nations system needed to improve its gender mainstreaming efforts and make related activities an integral part of the Organization's work. Such activities needed to be funded by core resources rather than depend on contributions by bilateral donors. The Government of Norway would allocate a significant amount of its international development cooperation budget for new gender equality interventions in 2007, with a specific budget line for the advancement of women, and increase its core funding for the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM).

28. To achieve better results in that regard, Norway had a three-pronged strategy: (1) better systems for mainstreaming gender perspective at all levels and in all relevant areas; (2) increased focus on targeted interventions for the advancement of women; and (3) equity in representation. In Norway, women's participation in the boards of privately owned public limited companies and State-owned companies had significantly increased in the past three years, with the former now being obligated to have at least 40 per cent women on their boards. Norway would provide substantial support to the implementation of the Gender Action Plan that had emerged from the high-level conference that it had co-hosted together with the United Kingdom and the World Bank on the Millennium Development Goals and women's economic rights.

29. The United Nations reform process was an opportunity to strengthen the Organization's role in advancing the situation for women and needed to produce tangible results on the ground. Norway supported the six key areas for action identified in the report of the Secretary-General providing the in-depth study on all forms of violence against women (A/61/122 and Add.1), and welcomed the initiative by the Netherlands and France for a resolution on violence against women to be adopted by the General Assembly.

30. Her country welcomed the upcoming open debate in the Security Council on resolution 1325 (2000). The Peacebuilding Commission should consistently include the gender perspective in all the issues that it considered; and her country advocated for the swift incorporation of a gender expert in the Peacebuilding Support Office. Lastly, Norway commended India for sending 125 police women to the United Nations peacekeeping operation in Liberia and hoped other troop-providing countries would follow suit.

31. **Ms. Li** Xiaomei (China) said that her country supported the continued implementation of gender mainstreaming by various United Nations agencies. At the first meeting of the Human Rights Council, it had pointed out that the Council should take measures for advancing the rights of vulnerable groups such as women in bringing about a new momentum for the international human rights cause.

32. When the Chinese Government had introduced its fifth and sixth periodic reports, which also included the second report of the Special Administrative Region of Hong Kong and the first report of the Administrative Region of Macao, before the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women in August 2006, it had outlined the measures that it had taken to implement the relevant Convention, such as the enactment or amendment of laws; measures towards establishing and improving mechanisms for promoting gender equality; pooling resources together to address issues related to women's survival and development; and campaigns to publicize the Convention and raise public awareness on gender equality. The Government had also taken steps and adopted policies as regards political participation, employment and trafficking of women.

33. The Chinese Government had also taken a number of measures over the past year to ensure women's rights and interests in line with the Outcome Document of the 2005 World Summit. Its National Development Programme devoted an entire section to safeguarding the rights and interests of women and

children and made numerous references to the Program for the Development of Chinese Women. Her Government would continue to work unremittingly to safeguard the rights and interests of Chinese women in line with national circumstances and in implementation of the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

34. **Ms. Barrett** (United States of America) said that her country had been engaged in sustained efforts to support women and their development, both in combating violence against women and in empowering them. Human trafficking not only harmed victims physically and emotionally, but also threatened public health and fuelled organized crime. In that respect, her country had contributed substantial funds bilaterally in the past five years towards anti-trafficking programmes in more than 100 countries, and regularly supported international organizations in assisting countries' efforts to combat trafficking. It also countered demand in trafficking through a law which prohibited nationals from engaging in child sex tourism anywhere in the world, travelling with the intent to engage in illicit sexual conduct or operating a child sex tour business, with serious penalties of up to 30 years in prison. Her country also had programmes to identify and assist victims, and help reunite them with their families.

35. The United States was providing access to health care for women, including maternal and child health. As nearly half of HIV/AIDS-infected adults were women, she commended the international community's gender-related work to combat HIV/AIDS. Also, her country was proud to be in the forefront of collecting health data disaggregated by gender. The President's $15 billion Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief worked to meet the needs of women and girls, including orphans and victims of sex trafficking, rape, abuse and exploitation and had helped over 3.2 million pregnant women prevent mother-to-child HIV transmission. In dealing with health risks to women, it was crucial to challenge behavioural norms, such as through "ABC" messages ("Abstain, Be faithful, use Condoms") being disseminated in South Africa.

36. Education, and literacy in particular, were the cornerstone of the fight against HIV/AIDS and for empowering women and girls to realize a better future, and were a major component of the country's efforts to support women and girls worldwide. In its global efforts to empower women, the United States Secretary of State had hosted a session with Ministers and Heads of State to discuss strategies for the political, economic, legal and educational empowerment of women worldwide, as part of a process to create a network of women leaders to continue a global dialogue. Also, the United States provided $50 million to $70 million annually on programmes for refugee women and children; prevention and response to gender-based violence in refugee camps and settings for internally displaced persons, and helping women in post-conflict situations through rebuilding schools, providing basic education and improving health care.

37. **Mr. Chowdhury** (Bangladesh) said that, while the primary responsibility for the advancement of women rested with Governments, efforts by the international community remained crucial for the full realization of the goals of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and its protocols and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Bangladesh remained fully committed to the principle of equal rights of men and women, and its Constitution guaranteed those rights and included provisions for special measures for the advancement of women and children.

38. Women had gained visibility and mobility in Bangladesh, owing to gender-parity in primary and secondary education and access to birth control measures and to microcredit. Significant progress had been achieved in maternal health and childcare. The special poverty needs of women had been addressed through various safety-net programmes, and the steady increase in the economic participation of women had been due to their employment in the garment, shoe and cosmetics industries in the formal sector, and self-employment in the non-formal sector.

39. The Government had undertaken pro-poor, gender responsive policies at all levels and had reflected gender dimensions in its Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs). It allocated a significant portion of its budget towards expanding women's education, which was free up to the twelfth grade. Economic empowerment had also led women towards political empowerment: Bangladesh had over 13,000 elected female representatives in local government, for example, and the country's positions of Prime Minister and Opposition Leader had been occupied by women for more than fifteen years. Despite that progress,

many challenges remained for Bangladeshi women, including the risk of being the "new poor", which resulted from globalization. The phasing out of the Multifibre Arrangement (MFA), for example, put more than one million women at risk of losing their jobs.

40. In that regard, international cooperation in the form of official development assistance (ODA) and technical and financial assistance was critical to keeping women employed. In a least developed country like Bangladesh, women's advancement was often linked with foreign direct investment, duty-free and quota-free market access for all products and the free movement of labour. Bangladesh was adopting a number of laws to protect women from violence, and crisis centres and safe custody homes had been set up to protect them from sexual abuse and harassment. The elimination of trafficking in persons, particularly women and children, was accorded particular priority both nationally, as through the establishment of the National Advisory Committee, and regionally, as through the Government's ratification of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) Convention on Preventing and Combating Trafficking in Women and Children for Prostitution.

41. Bangladesh was a State party to almost all the major international instruments relating to women's rights and was active in the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and the Human Rights Council. As a member of the Peacebuilding Commission, Bangladesh remained fully committed to strengthening its efforts to implement Security Council resolution 1325 (2000). Global partnerships were needed to achieve gender equality and gender justice. To that end, the mobilization of adequate international resources to supplement national efforts was a categorical imperative.

42. **Mr. Chem** (Cambodia) said that in response to the 2005 World Summit Outcome, the Government of Cambodia had adopted the National Strategic Development Plan (NSDP) which consolidated its Socio-economic Development Plan, National Poverty Reduction Strategy and the Millennium Development Goals into a single planning and monitoring framework. The NSDP recognized that the speedy removal of latent and overt barriers to gender equalities was critical to poverty reduction. The Ministry of Women's Affairs was elaborating responsive policies and strategies, helping to enhance the economic empowerment for women, develop related laws and mechanisms to protect the rights of women, promote HIV/AIDS prevention, control nutrition of women and girls and increase their participation in formal and non-formal education.

43. Those efforts had had a positive impact on women's health, as reflected in the significant reduction in the number of women receiving gynaecological-obstetric inpatient care, and the fact that the hospital maternal mortality rate had remained stable in the past five years. The Government had recently adopted the Law on the Prevention of Domestic Violence and the Protection of the Victims, which played a significant role in the enforcement of measures to ensure safety for victims of domestic violence. Cambodia highly appreciated the contributions by the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) in their efforts to promote gender equality and empower women, as well as the accomplishments of the United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW) in promoting the cause of women in the world, in particular in developing countries.

44. Because women still faced limitations and obstacles, many continued to be left behind in the process of globalization, and the opening of national borders made them more susceptible to becoming victims of trafficking. In that regard, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action remained the benchmark for the efforts of Governments and the international community to further the advancement of women. A balanced and comprehensive approach was needed to achieve relevant objectives. The international community should thus remain firm in its commitment to assist developing nations and honour its commitments to official development assistance (ODA), in particular to least developed countries under the Brussels Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries. Those concerted efforts were required for the successful achievement of the Millennium Development Goals and, in particular, in the improvement of lives of women.

45. **Mrs. Assoumou** (Côte d'Ivoire) said that Côte d'Ivoire had ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, all of the outcome document of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly and the Millennium Development Goals, all of which indicated her Government's commitment to the promotion of

women's rights. Since the outbreak of military conflict, women and young girls had suffered greatly, falling victim to physical and sexual violence. As a result of the war, women had stepped into leadership roles in the family, politics and the economy.

46. The women of Côte d'Ivoire supported Security Council resolution 1325 (2000), which called for women to participate more actively in peace negotiations and post-war reconstruction. As a result, women would be involved in activities to promote the cause of peace and more and more of them would be a part of decision-making bodies. Two hundred women candidates had already been trained to run in general elections. The Government of Côte d'Ivoire was mainstreaming a gender perspective and had created a department to oversee and promote gender equality within the Ministry of Family and Social Affairs. However, in spite of all the progress made, women were still hampered in their advancement, experiencing ill-treatment and marginalization.

47. **Mr. Sin** Song Chol (Democratic People's Republic of Korea) said that, in 1946, his country had adopted a law on the equality of the sexes. Its most recent report to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women had been considered in 2005 and had been the subject of a frank and constructive dialogue.

48. He drew the attention of the Committee to attempts by Japan to conceal crimes that it had committed during the Second World War, such as military sexual slavery, also known as the "comfort women" system, the forced conscription of millions of people from Asian countries and the massacre of 1 million Koreans. The Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences had recommended that the Japanese Government accept legal responsibility for the crime of sexual slavery, make a public apology and compensate the victims. However, the recommendations had not been implemented. The attitude of Japan was in striking contrast to that of other countries which had made continued efforts to apologize to victims and compensate them for past wrongs.

49. **Mr. Tarrago** (Brazil), speaking on behalf of MERCOSUR reaffirmed its support for all of the major women's rights instruments and underscored the importance of equal conditions in the workplace. MERCOSUR was committed to supporting new forms of entrepreneurship, formalizing domestic work and promoting the rights of indigenous and rural workers. A great accomplishment in the area of gender equality was the election of Ms. Michelle Bachelet to the Presidency of the Republic of Chile during the current year. It was important to foster an attitude of respect for all, regardless of sexual orientation, and to provide access to sexual and reproductive health services, which would reduce the spread of sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS, a disease which was spreading among women.

50. MERCOSUR welcomed the Secretary-General's in-depth study on all forms of violence against women. In 1994, the MERCOSUR region had adopted the Convention of Belem do Para do Para to Prevent, Punish and Eradicate Violence against Women, considered a model for binding treaties on violence against women. Violence against women was not only an expression of inequality of power between men and women, but also had negative repercussions, including missed workdays, the feminization of HIV/AIDS and poverty and poor school performance by children who witnessed such violence. A broad arsenal of techniques, including social support services and the employment of preventive arrest in case of threats, needed to be applied in order to combat violence against women. Lastly, he pointed out that, in 2006, the Organization of American States had developed a hemispheric strategy containing a vast array of measures to confront the problem of human trafficking, particularly of women and children.

51. **Mr. Chernenko** (Russian Federation) said that the Secretary-General's in-depth study on violence against women was a most significant document. However, some of its provisions, particularly in the section on violence against women in armed conflict, were tendentious and inappropriately politicized, hampering resolution of the issue by the international community. The fiftieth session of the Commission on the Status of Women had been conducted in a constructive spirit. There were grounds for optimism that the confrontational stance characterizing previous sessions would be overcome and that the reform of the Commission would continue to be conducted in a constructive and non-politicized manner.

52. The Russian Federation strongly adhered to the provisions of the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Its combined sixth and seventh periodic reports were being prepared

and would be submitted during the current year. A new programme document entitled Gender Strategy of the Russian Federation had been discussed in an inter-agency gender equality commission. The gender strategy would establish the requirements and criteria for guaranteeing equal rights and opportunities for women in all aspects of life in the country. The strong and growing Russian economy had had a beneficial effect on social development, improving living standards for women. During the current year, President Putin had announced measures to aid pregnant women and mothers caring for young children as well as assistance to women returning to the workforce after giving birth.

53. **Ms. Sapag** (Chile) stressed the importance of implementing international commitments dealing with gender equality and women's empowerment and reaffirmed Chile's commitment to implement the relevant Conventions and the Beijing Platform for Action and to attain the Millennium Development Goals. She also welcomed the Secretary-General's in-depth study on all forms of violence against women (A/61/122 and Add.1), which would help States in their implementation and follow-up of the relevant policies.

54. For the first time in its history, Chile had a woman President, who had been elected with 53 per cent of the vote and had mainstreamed gender equality in the remit of all her senior collaborators. She had made a qualitative leap forward in Chile in terms of putting women in positions of political power. Obstacles remained to be overcome, however, owing to the "binominal" (two-seat) electoral system, which undermined women's election chances. Hence, efforts to have a quota law enacted were being made by the National Women's Service (SERNAM), which was also currently implementing is Second Equal Opportunities Plan.

55. President Bachelet had issued a Code of Good Practice regarding equal opportunities and treatment in the public sector, and measures for reconciling work and family responsibilities in the bodies of the State Central Administration. It was hoped that the private sector would endorse those measures. The Chilean justice system had been modernized through the creation of family courts, accompanied by new laws governing domestic violence, civil marriage, and sexual harassment in the workplace, and amendments to the filiation laws. Chile had set up 29 reception centres to deal with domestic violence around the country, as well as a national hotline, and in 2007 would be opening shelters for women and children affected by violence, with a view to their subsequent reintegration. Such progress would not have been possible without guidelines from the United Nations and its agencies. Chile today had a historic opportunity now that it had a female President who stood up for women.

56. **Ms. Ageel** (Saudi Arabia) said that her country accorded particular importance to the status of women from cradle to grave, based on numerous passages of the sharia that stressed women's equality with men in terms of their humanity and their rights. Two important underlying Koranic principles, the unity of creation of the two sexes from a single soul and the balance of mutual obligations and rights between women and men, had inspired the Saudi Arabian Constitution, article 9 of which provided: "The family is the kernel of Saudi society, and its members shall be brought up on the basis of the Islamic faith ...". The country's current development plan was founded on the strengthening of the family, the preservation of Arab and Islamic family values, the enhancement of women's participation and the development of their capacities; the rights of citizens and their families in times of emergency, sickness, disability and old age; support for the social security system and encouragement of charitable works; and the empowerment of women both within the family and in the workplace.

57. Significant progress had been realized in the field of education, where all needs in terms of buildings, teachers and curricula had been met. In particular, a rapid increase in female enrolment had closed the gap between boys and girls at the secondary and university levels and nearly so at the primary level. Female students constituted 48.6 per cent of the total, the corresponding percentages at the primary and secondary levels being 48 and 50.3 per cent, respectively. In higher education, female students now exceeded male students, representing 56.5 per cent. Saudi Arabia was also witnessing an increase in the participation of women in all Government sectors, as well as in the media and in cultural and educational fields. Many had higher degrees in science and occupied high posts in the academic and medical worlds. One should not forget that, in 2000, Saudi Arabia had signed the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

58. Saudi Arabian women played an important role in charitable and social organizations, the establishment of which was encouraged by the Government, and in chambers of commerce, the Shura (Advisory) Council and national dialogue conferences. They also made important contributions to the economy, particularly in the area of investment, where their invested savings, including those of an increasing number of Saudi Arabian businesswomen, amounted to approximately 15 billion riyals. Available statistics showed that the number of women-owned businesses entered in the commercial register was over 22,500, representing more than 4.7 per cent of the establishments registered with chambers of commerce and industry in the Kingdom and including a variety of economic activities, among them industrial and agricultural activities, many of which, such as contracting and construction, had in the past been the preserve of men. Lastly, the Government was making every effort for the advancement of women, in keeping with the sharia, in order to assure them a constructive role in society.

59. **Ms. Feller** (Mexico) said that, while there had been some improvement in the lot of women in Latin America, all kinds of discrimination based on gender discrimination remained. Mexico was fully committed to implementing the Beijing Platform for Action, especially in areas of major concern. Her delegation was convinced that, through a policy of openness and cooperation with international women's rights bodies and the promotion of new initiatives, a path was being forged towards eradicating the practices of discrimination and inequality of which many Mexican women were victims.

60. Violence against women had been a serious impediment to the success of development plans and respect for human rights and severely disrupted Latin American societies. She therefore welcomed the Secretary-General's in-depth study on the subject and the INSTRAW Gender Awareness Information and Networking System. With invaluable UNIFEM support, Mexico had developed a national system, the first in the region, for improving gender indicators and statistics, which served as a basis for implementing national policies and services in favour of women, and was seeking to export the model to other Latin American and Caribbean countries. UNIFEM was a strategic tool for strengthening national bodies involved in women's issues and provided invaluable assistance on the ground through its technical assistance and its help in forging solid alliances between Governments and civil society. Her country, a staunch contributor to UNIFEM and INSTRAW, felt that more tangible results in terms of time management, effective use of resources, and elimination of duplication could be achieved through effective coordination and the creation of synergies among agencies involved with gender issues.

61. Her delegation was convinced that the difficulty in implementing the instruments for guaranteeing respect for women's rights lay in deficient dissemination of information and promotion of those rights. As long as women were unaware of their rights, Governments could do little to guarantee them. What was needed was reliable indicators and statistics, access to justice for women and effective monitoring mechanisms. Above all, however, education was the essential requirement. As long as the gender dimension was not incorporated into curricula and men were not involved in those efforts, one could expect nothing but fragile and limited results.

62. **Mr. Pekarchuk** (Ukraine) said that sexual exploitation and trafficking in women remained among the worst forms of violence against women, as confirmed in the study by the Secretary-General. Experience over the previous decade suggested that those forms of abuse were on the rise, especially in areas of armed conflict. His delegation therefore hoped for the successful completion of negotiations on the draft resolutions under consideration on trafficking in women and girls, and on slavery and trafficking in persons. Efforts needed to be redoubled to end the brutal phenomena of sexual exploitation, trafficking, and other forms of violence against women.

63. Reaffirming Ukraine's commitment to the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome document of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, both of which constituted an overarching framework for gender equality, a national priority for his country, he said that Ukraine saw women's empowerment and gender mainstreaming not only as important objectives, but also as a means of achieving the Millennium Development Goals. More than 1 million women in Ukraine were engaged in entrepreneurial activities and almost half of all women in the country had received higher education or secondary special education, while women accounted for more than half of all university students.

64. His country's proactive approach had resulted in a number of initiatives undertaken by the Government to promote women's empowerment and gender equality, including the passing of relevant laws and decrees, the preparation of a gender strategy, and the drawing up of a national programme on the establishment of gender equality, which was soon to be adopted. A parliamentary subcommittee on gender equality, a ministerial coordination council on equal rights, the Ministry of Family, Youth and Sports, national and local authorities, and civil society organizations had also been established.

65. Ukraine was a party to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, had ratified the Optional Protocol and did its utmost to fulfil its reporting obligations to the relevant treaty body. Significantly, Kyiv had recently hosted the thirty-first session of the General Assembly of the International Council of Women (ICW), at which the First Lady had declared that Ukraine was responding with dignity to the challenge for all democratic countries: that of giving women a chance for advancement.

66. **Ms. Na-Allah** (Niger) said that her Government had taken several steps for the advancement of women and the promotion of gender equality in accordance with the recommendations of the Fourth World Conference on Women and other relevant United Nations resolutions and recommendations. Niger had adopted legislation requiring that at least 10 per cent of elected officials in the Government and State administration should be women, which had resulted in the election of 14 women to parliament and 6 women to the post of Government Minister. Two major programmes had also been developed on the legal status of women and on women leadership.

67. Some 63 per cent of the population of the Niger lived below the poverty line, of which 73 per cent were women. Her Government was making efforts to address the situation through several projects and programmes, including the extension of microcredit to women, especially poor women in rural areas, and other means of promoting income-generating activities. The Niger had also adopted legislation to promote education and training for all children without any gender-based discrimination.

68. Despite economic difficulties, considerable efforts had been made to improve access to health services, including the construction of treatment centres, the training of community health providers, a vaccination programme, a family planning programme and activities to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases. Women and children were the cornerstone of her Government's health policies. Mothers and children received free treatment and family planning services.

69. Concerning violence against women, the Niger had reformed its Penal Code to include such crimes as slavery, female genital mutilation and sexual harassment and had strengthened penalties against offences such as rape. In conclusion, her delegation reiterated the Niger's commitment to improving the situation of women and expressed its gratitude for the bilateral and multilateral efforts made to improve the lives of the country's women. It underscored, in particular, the role played by the United Nations Development Fund for Women in that regard.

70. **Mr. Fieschi** (France), speaking also on behalf of the delegation of the Netherlands, said that difficulty in measuring the extent and the nature of violence against women had led to disagreement on the appropriate methods for combating the scourge. Thus, the Secretary-General's in-depth report on violence against women, which was based on extensive research, statistical studies, information provided by Member States and information resulting from regional and international consultations, should receive delegations' priority attention. France, together with the Netherlands, would soon submit a draft resolution aimed at stepping up efforts to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women, with a view to its adoption by consensus.

71. **Mr. Shinyo** (Japan), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that it was unfortunate that the representative of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea had raised old issues that were not germane to the agenda item under discussion. The issue had been recognized by his Government on many occasions, including in the joint Pyongyang Declaration by Japan and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and in a statement by the President of Japan in 2005. Japan had consistently contributed to the promotion of peace and security since the Second World War. The numbers mentioned by the representative of the Democratic People's Republic were grossly exaggerated and were unacceptable to his delegation. The unsubstantiated statement made by him could not be used as an excuse

for abductions by that country, which were a clear violation of human rights and a continuing problem.

72. Regarding the reform of the Security Council, which was also irrelevant to the agenda item under consideration, his Government's position was that permanent membership should be based on a Member State's contributions to peace and security. He drew attention to the statement by the Security Council of 8 October 2006 urging the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to implement its resolution 1695 (2006), including returning at an early date to the Six-Party Talks, the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) and International Atomic Energy Agency safeguards.

73. **Mr. Sin** Song Chol (Democratic People's Republic of Korea), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said his delegation had only told the pure and simple truth about its history and urged Japan to act honourably. The Japanese delegation was once again attempting to cover up its blood-stained past and deny and distort its crimes against humanity. He referred to the threat posed by Japan's extreme right, including incitement to hatred of Koreans in Japan. Japan had forcibly abducted 8.4 million Koreans during its occupation of the Korean Peninsula and had forced sexual slavery on 200,000 Korean women and girls.

74. Koreans held a profound grudge against Japan, which must be cancelled with blood. Even today, after more than half a century, the whereabouts of most of those victims remained unknown. Despite Japan's talk about human rights, it had not told the truth about the fate of those victims, nor had it offered a sincere apology or honest compensation. Japan might be rich in terms of material wealth, but it posed a grave threat to the international community because it was extremely poor in terms of morality and ethics.

75. **Mr. Shinyo** (Japan), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that what needed to be addressed was the current issue of the abductions of Japanese by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, which it could not pretend had not occurred. One should also ask which country posed a grave threat to the international community; the answer was the Democratic People's Republic, in view of its statement the previous day that it had engaged in nuclear testing. Japan, meanwhile, had been promoting the rights of women and children for more than 60 years.

76. **Mr. Sin** Song Chol (Democratic People's Republic of Korea), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said it was absurd that Japan should claim that its past crimes had been "liquidated". The abduction issue had been totally resolved in the Pyongyang Declaration, which his Government had fully implemented, leaving no outstanding issues. But Japan had unilaterally rejected that Declaration and constantly betrayed it. He reiterated his country's request to Japan, made at the Beijing meeting on 4-8 July, to return disputed ashes for DNA testing, which Japan had so far not granted. Japan was engaging in a malicious cover-up and shirking its obligations. He strongly urged Japan to accept responsibility for past crimes, including military sexual slavery.

The meeting rose at 6 p.m.